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Israeli Probe of Pollard Called Lacking by Modai

Justice Minister Says 3 Officials Fired

By Joe Pichirallo
Washington Post Staff Writer

Israeli Justice Minister Yitzhak Modai said yesterday that his government's investigation of the Jonathan Jay Pollard spy case failed to uncover key aspects of the operation, including the role of an Israeli Air Force officer and the opening of a foreign bank account for Pollard.

Modai, speaking at a news conference at the Israeli Embassy here, said three Israeli officials implicated in the espionage operation, including alleged spy master Rafael (Rafi) Eitan, were fired for their roles in the espionage after being tried before an Israeli government administrative hearing.

But in Jerusalem yesterday, two senior Israeli government officials, who asked not to be identified, sharply disputed Modai's comments. The Israeli officials flatly denied that any administrative hearing was held or that anyone has been fired, Washington Post correspondent William Claiborne reported from Jerusalem.

"I'm sure it will get an official denial from the prime minister's office," one Israeli official said.

"The man [Modai] doesn't have the faintest idea of what he is talking about. He was finance minister when all of this was happening," said a senior Israeli official close to government discussions on the Pollard case.

One U.S. official who is familiar with the Pollard case said yesterday, "If what he [Modai] is saying is true, then [the Israelis] didn't do a professional investigation on this case."

Modai became justice minister in April as part of a compromise aimed at defusing a controversy involving Modai and Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who had demanded Modai's resignation as finance minister after

Modai accused Peres of squandering government funds on foreign travel and partisan political activities.

Modai, who was flanked by Israeli Ambassador Meir Rosenne when he spoke to reporters, defended Israel's handling of the Pollard case and said that Israel's close relationship with the United States caused it to allow the unprecedented questioning of government officials in Israel by U.S. investigators last December. "I don't think this has been done before in any country," he said.

Referring to the Pollard case as an "unauthorized, regrettable deviation" from Israeli government policy, Modai said that in meetings here with U.S. officials, including Attorney General Edwin Meese III and Secretary of State George P. Shultz, he has asked that the Pollard investigation be completed as soon as possible. He said Israel would like to "minimize" any damage the case has caused to U.S.-Israeli relations and wants the case to "get out of the way."

Pressed by reporters about the extent of Israel's inquiry, Modai said: "We did investigate the matter. We reached conclusions, and we acted accordingly."

He said Israeli law would prevent the government from attempting to reinterview Eitan and two others implicated in the case about why they did not disclose the role of Brig. Gen. Aviem (Avi) Sella, an Israeli Air Force officer who allegedly served as Pollard's first contact, or that Eitan and his aides planned to deposit \$300,000 in a Swiss bank account for Pollard over 10 years.

"You don't try people twice," Modai said. He also said that the Israeli investigation did not uncover the fact that Pollard's handlers had obtained an Israeli passport for Pollard under a fake name.

U.S. investigators first learned of



YITZHAK MODAI

... defends probe despite omissions

the passport, the role of Sella and the bank account from Pollard after the former civilian Navy counter-intelligence analyst began cooperating.

"This guy [Pollard] is protecting himself," Modai said. "I'll say he got a passport when I see it."

Modai also said the appointment of Eitan as the chairman of an Israeli government-owned chemical company after the revelation of his role in the Pollard case was "not a reward." He said that as finance minister he had approved the new position because of Eitan's long intelligence career and because he is in poor health. "I do see the problem of appearances," Modai said.

Sella, who was a colonel when he became involved with Pollard, was later promoted to brigadier general. Modai said he could not answer questions about Sella because "Sella is a matter for the [military]."